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C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 000750

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FOR WHA A/S SHANNON

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [CU](#) [PO](#)
SUBJECT: CUBAN FM DISCUSSES EU POLICY IN PORTUGAL

REF: LISBON 670

Classified By: POL CHIEF TROY FITRELL, REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary: During a March 16 visit to Lisbon, Cuban Foreign Minister Perez discussed the EU,s Cuba policy with Portuguese Foreign Minister Amado, urging Portugal to support greater EU-Cuba engagement. Amado responded that the Cuban government needed to undertake major political reform before EU policy could change. Amado held out the idea that should Cuba take significant action, such as freeing political prisoners, Portugal would advocate a less stringent policy within the EU. Perez reportedly said that the Cuban government was already engaged in high-level talks with Washington on the subject of political prisoners, aided by the Spanish. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque visited Portugal March 16 for discussions with Portuguese Foreign Minister Luis Amado as part of a greater European tour which included Geneva, Madrid and Rome. Amado,s diplomatic advisor, Paulo Lourenco, told us that the two ministers who have known one another for years, had a private meeting with no notetakers, followed by a lunch with senior staff. Amado briefed his staff following the visit.

¶3. (C) Lourenco related that Perez complained vociferously about the European Union (EU) policy on Cuba, as it effectively proscribed the two from pursuing a positive relationship. Amado reportedly stressed that the EU,s relationship with Cuba was governed by the same criteria that governed its relationship with any state, namely human rights and the rule of law. The EU, noted Amado, needed to stick by its fundamental principles and that it would be better for Cuba to fix the underlying problems than to complain about the EU,s response.

¶5. (C) According to Lourenco, Amado told Perez that the EU would need a significant gesture by Cuba, after which Portugal could push for a less stringent Cuba policy within the EU. Amado noted that the two sides needed to break the impasse - in which Cuba and the EU each waited for the other to take first action - by acting in near tandem. Should Cuba take significant action such as releasing political prisoners, enacting a moratorium on the death penalty, and ratifying certain international agreements, Amado suggested, the EU would be prepared to respond quickly with diplomatic, cultural, and especially economic overtures.

¶6. (C) Lourenco told us that at the mention of releasing political prisoners, Perez said Cuba was engaged in high-level discussions with Washington on that very topic, aided by the Spanish. Perez reportedly suggested that Portugal could play a useful role in the discussions with Washington. Lourenco told us that he had discussed Cuba with WHA A/S Shannon recently and hoped the embassy would relay this message to A/S Shannon as soon as possible.

¶7. (U) On the media front, the Cuban diplomat took the occasion of his visit to criticize publicly the former conservative governments in Portugal, Spain, and Italy that he said had soured relations between Cuba and the European Union at the behest of the United States. As each of those three states now have Socialist governments, Perez noted in a press conference that a new opportunity for engagement was possible.

Comment

¶8. (C) The Cubans continue to press their case for greater diplomatic engagement with the EU, seeking to exploit the lack of a common EU position on Cuba. If Perez had hoped to sway Portugal to adopt a more pro-Cuba stance around which other EU member-states might rally during its upcoming EU Presidency, he failed. As Amado noted, absent major reform, post does not predict a shift in engagement policy.

¶9. (C) Amado's instruction to Lourenco to contact us in advance of the Amado-Perez meeting (reftel) underscores his commitment to coordinate closely with the USG on Cuba issues. No doubt, the MFA is hoping that Portugal can play a useful role in the ongoing dialogue as outlined in para 6, consistent with its desire for Portugal to play a greater role in the international arena.
Hoffman